# BEFORE THE FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION WASHINGTON, D.C.

AUG 9 1994

In the Matter of	
Implementation of Section 309(j)	GN Docket No. 93-252
of the Communications Act - Competitive Bidding	DOCKET FILE COPY CAIGINAL

#### INITIAL COMMENTS OF SOUTHWESTERN BELL CORPORATION

Comes now Southwestern Bell Corporation ("Southwestern Bell" or "SBC"), on behalf of itself and its affiliates, and files these <u>Initial Comments</u> in response to the Federal Communications Commission's ("FCC") <u>Second Further Notice of Proposed Rule Making (FNPRM II)</u> released on July 20, 1994.

### I. <u>INTRODUCTION</u>

This FNPRM II is at least the fifth attempt by the FCC to adopt attribution rules for applying various eligibility restrictions to personal communications services ("PCS") applicants. With nearly every proposal, the agency moves further and further from the declared recent desire of both this Commission and the Congress "to establish a regulatory regime in which the marketplace—and not the regulatory arena—shapes the development and delivery of mobile services to meet the demands

Previous attempts include the Third and Fifth Reports and Orders In the Matter of Section 309(j) of the Communications Act - Competitive Bidding, PP Docket No. 93-253, which developed different attribution rules for narrowband and broadband PCS applications, the Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking in this docket (released May 20, 1994), which proposed a spectrum aggregation limit and accompanying attribution rules to define such a limit, and most recently, the Further Order on Reconsideration in GEN Docket No. 90-314 released July 22, 1994, adopting a "multiplier" for calculating the precise minority interest level.

The only exception appears to be the recent multiplier decision, which makes it appropriately easier and more fair for companies with minority interests in cellular properties to participate in PCS.

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and needs of consumers."<sup>3</sup> While the FCC is quite right to act to avoid unjust enrichment in the award of spectrum licenses to designated entities, the law is already well-equipped to prevent other types of abuse about which the FNPRM II is concerned.<sup>4</sup> For instance, federal law contains quite specific provisions prohibiting improper relationships among competitors designed to impede competition. Most importantly, adopting the proposal in this phase will severely hamper the ability of designated entities to acquire the necessary management and technical expertise to operate wireless businesses in the sophisticated world of personal communications services, the Commission will subvert the purpose of the special rules designed to encourage designated entities to participate in this business, contrary to the purpose of the Commission and the Congress.

Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, GN Docket No. 93-252, released May 20, 1994, ¶ 12 and citing Second Report and Order therein, ¶ 13 and n.29.

One area of the attribution standards, however, still needs to be addressed. While the Commission has been relentless and meticulous in defining the extent to which ownership of cellular interests would disqualify an entity from acquiring a PCS license, it has totally failed to include any specialized mobile radio ("SMR") interests in this prohibition. As SBC has pointed out in various filings before the Commission (see Initial Comments on Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, GN Docket No. 93-252 and <u>Petition for Reconsideration</u> of the <u>Third Report</u> and Order herein), enhanced SMR ("ESMR") was developed for the express purpose of providing further competition in two-way wireless services. SMR licensees increasingly provide interconnected service for profit, either using earlier SMR equipment or deploying newer ESMR technology. If the ownership of cellular interests disqualifies a firm from a PCS license because of the potential concentration of market power, such conclusion must be equally true of an ESMR licensee. The proposed transaction between MCI and Nextel, in addition to Nextel's recently announced plans to acquire its last major rival, DialPage, and radio licenses from Motorola (expanding its wireless coverage to 85% of the U.S. population), only makes this conclusion more of a necessity. The Commission should promptly adopt this aspect of SBC's Petition for Reconsideration.

II. ONCE A MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT OR JOINT MARKETING AGREEMENT IS DETERMINED NOT TO TRANSFER CONTROL OF THE AFFECTED LICENSE, THE FCC'S CONCERN IS ENDED.

From the beginning of its long process of developing procedures for spectrum auctions, this Commission has been quite diligent in prevent unjust enrichment. The earlier use of lotteries to assign spectrum licenses for cellular service created an unprecedented opportunity for such enrichment to occur and was part of the reason for adoption of the auction process.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Congress specifically mandated that the FCC guard against unjust enrichment when the spectrum auction authorization was To prevent someone other than a designated entity from being enriched by the set-asides, the FCC has both defined the qualifications for designated entity status in a very narrow manner, and developed attribution rules designed to prevent exotic corporate structures from being used to subvert the qualification rules. Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993, PUB. L. No. 103-66 107 STAT. § 12 (1993). These standards include measurement of the ownership of both passive and active control of the equity of the entity.

In the <u>FNPRM II</u> the Commission raises the concern that other arrangements besides equity holdings might have the effect of divesting control from the entity for whom the benefit is designed. Management agreements and joint marketing agreements are singled out as posing this possibility. The Commission recognized, however, that a management or joint marketing agreement "...which confers on a party other than the licensee <u>defacto</u> control over an FCC-licensed facility will be considered an

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup>See e.g., Second Report and Order, herein, 9 F.C.C.R. 2348, released April 20, 1994, at ¶ 57.

acknowledged that "...any such agreement conferring de facto control would violate Section 310(d) of the Act if the agreement has not been disclosed and approved by the Commission." Id., n.7. Moreover, the law discerning when a management agreement has risen to the level of a transfer of control of a licensee is well defined. Id., citing inter alia Intermountain Microwave, 24 RR 983 (1963). Therefore, it limited the scope of the instant inquiry to "management agreements or similar arrangements that do not confer de facto control on a party other the licensee...."

Id., ¶ 6 (emphasis supplied).

However, if a management or a joint marketing agreement does not transfer control of the underlying license (and therefore is lawful and does not in the normal course require Commission approval), it cannot create the problem for which the attribution standards were created. Rather, the control of the license and therefore the benefit of the special treatment remain with the true licensee (i.e., here, the designated entity). Indeed, a key element in determining whether control has been transferred is whether the licensee "receive[s] monies and profits derived from operation of the licensed facilities...."

Id., ¶ 7. No abuse can occur when control has not been transferred away from the licensee and the Commission's inquiry should be at an end.

The Commission expressed concern, however, that such agreements "...may involve levels of integration...which have the effect of reducing competitive choices...or of creating a sham or front corporation..." Id. Southwestern Bell submits that the Commission has merely restated the current transfer of control

standard. If control of the license is shifted, the arrangement is already unlawful unless specifically approved. No further Commission rule is thus needed. If control is not shifted, however, by definition no "sham" has occurred and no "front corporation" exists. Instead, the licensee remains in control, with all that means. The fact that a management or joint venture agreement may govern operations will not affect the licensee's ultimate right to direct strategies and marketing options.

Indeed, the licensee must retain the right to determine and carry out policy decisions if it wants to establish that control of the licensee has not been transferred to a third party. Id.

The Commission's distrust of management agreements in particular misunderstands the nature of such undertakings.

Entering into a management agreement, provided that the agreement does not cross the line of conveying control of the license to a third party, effectively allows a licensee to employ a set of qualified managers. Inasmuch as the designated entity set-asides were intended to allow designated entities to enter and to succeed in the PSC business, adopting a rule which effectively precludes access to the requisite management and technical expertise surely will not help designated entities succeed or even survive.

Because the use of management and joint venture agreements will neither deflect the benefit of designated entity treatment from its intended beneficiaries nor result in a transfer of control, they should not be treated as attributable interests.

The FNPRM II worries that management agreements, even while not shifting control to a third party, might "permit the manager access to market sensitive information" and thereby "enable it to impede vigorous competition." Id., ¶ 6. The information about which the Commission is concerned consists of "business plans, customer lists, product and service development and marketing strategies." Id. The concern is misplaced, however. While some sharing of such information is proper, both federal antitrust law and state rules on corporate governance impose a fiduciary obligation on owners and key managers to protect company assets. See e.g., United States v. General Electric, 82 F. Supp. 753 (D.N.J. 1949); Proctor v. State Farm, 675 F.2d 308 (D.C. Cir. 1982). This serves as a powerful deterrent to any inappropriate use of such information, for violation of these standards can be quite costly.

Fundamentally, the Commission's concern demeans the designated entity's ability to protect the value of its investment and the fruits of its risk-taking. No reasonable business person would enter into a management agreement with an actual or potential competitor without stringent, enforceable provisions regarding any use of confidential information. If such provisions are violated, both criminal and civil sanctions are available.

Because existing safeguards are adequate to protect against the kind of abuses envisioned by the Commission, it need not and should not expand the definition of attributable interest to include management and joint venture agreements.

IV. INCLUDING MANAGEMENT AGREEMENTS AND JOINT VENTURE AGREEMENTS IN THE DEFINITION OF ATTRIBUTABLE INTERESTS IS NOT IN THE INTEREST OF DESIGNATED ENTITIES.

An unfortunate consequence of the Commission's proposal to include management and joint venture agreements in the definition of attributable interests is the impact this change will have on those who unquestionably qualify for designated entity status. By foreclosing to other companies any significant equity, financing and now management interest in the licenses held by designated entities, the Commission will make it much more difficult for designated entities to operate a successful business.

The current attribution rules do not permit significant equity or financing interests by non-qualifying parties. Without the prospect of substantial ownership interests available, potential supporters of designated entities must find other ways to protect their investment. A management agreement often fills that void, for it permits the financing entity some assurances that a designated entity entrepreneur will be assisted by able hands. Without that avenue, however, the supporter is left to require the stringent fiscal assurances which accompany debt financing. This could have a deleterious impact on the availability of capital to the designated entity as well as its long-term flexibility and financial stability.

After all, the very reason for providing credits, setasides and other special mechanisms for designated entity participation is the fact that such companies rarely have access to traditional capital markets. These companies are likely to be more poorly financed, undercapitalized and less experienced than the other companies against which they will compete for business. They ought not to be further handicapped by the Commission's eagerness for some vague concept of qualification "purity."

V. THE FCC SHOULD NOT CONFUSE JOINT SERVICE MARK OR MARKETING ARRANGEMENTS WITH TRADEMARK LICENSING OR INTEROPERABILITY AGREEMENTS.

At a minimum, the Commission should clarify that any rule that attributes ownership based upon joint marketing arrangements does not encompass service mark and trademark licensing (e.g., Cellular One, MobiLink and interoperability agreements (e.g., North American Cellular Network). These types of agreements are becoming increasingly common-place and are clearly in the public interest. For example, Cellular One® and MobiLink are service marks used by the cellular A band and B band carriers, respectively, to denote compliance with certain service quality standards, as well as other customer-benefiting features. Similarly, interoperability agreements such as the North American Cellular Network denote to customers that automatic roaming and automatic call delivery will be available throughout the country from those carriers who are members. types of agreements thus further the goal of a nationwide seamless wireless service which is customer-friendly.

To attribute ownership based upon a broad definition or application of joint marketing agreements would not further the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup>See In the Matter of Implementation of Section 309(j) of the Communications Act--Competitive Bidding, PP Docket No. 93-253, Fifth Report and Order, ¶ 11, released July 15, 1994.

elimination of the Commission's concerns. Under both types of agreements, only minimal amounts of customer or market information are shared between the carriers. With regard to Cellular One®, only that customer quality information necessary to ensure compliance with its standards is shared by the licensee, and then typically to the licensor, not the other licensees. Licensing fees are based strictly on the number of POPs served by the licensee - a publicly available figure. In a similar vein, parties to interoperability agreements share technical information and only that customer information necessary to provide cellular service to a roaming customer. Again, the basis for the Commission's concerns over joint marketing agreements are absent in these situations.

More fundamentally, to attribute ownership interests to originators of these services would effectively tell them that their considerable efforts to achieve customer- and market-oriented goals such as seamless nationwide service are disfavored by the Commission, and have rebounded to their distinct disadvantage. Indeed, it would be like sanctioning the Underwriters Lab or "Good Housekeeping" magazine for establishing their respective seals of approval. Those with similar innovative ideas to make cellular service more user-friendly would undoubtedly take note of the "benefit" of previous efforts.

In sum, given that these types of agreements do not create the concerns over sharing of detailed marketing and customer information that might tend to lesson competition in wireless markets, the Commission should specifically state that these agreements are not covered by any joint marketing attribution rules. The public interest would clearly be ill-

served otherwise.

#### VI. CONCLUSION

The FCC's desire to prevent the defeat of the purpose behind the designated entity set-aside is both understandable and laudable. In its zeal to undertake its statutory obligation, however, the Commission has proposed restrictions which would harm the very parties it wishes to protect. Other existing safeguards more than adequately protect against the problems the Commission fears. The proposals of the Second Further Proposed Notice of Rulemaking should therefore be rejected.

Respectfully submitted,
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## CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, Martha R. Kiely, hereby certify that copies of the foregoing Initial Comments of Southwestern Bell Corporation have been served by first class United States mail, postage prepaid, on the parties listed on the attached.

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